



Step 2: Maintaining Partnerships

Communicating Successes

Whether you are marketing CERT initially or working to gain additional support, it is important that you communicate CERT successes. By communicating successes, you will garner more support from the community by establishing a familiar presence for the program over a period of time.

Establishing a Communication Strategy

Because CERTs deal with everyday citizens, CERT success stories make good news stories. Communicating successes should be an on-going effort because every segment of the community has potential CERT volunteers or sponsors. Seeing CERTs in action and involved in the public safety of individuals, families, employees, and the community can motivate volunteers and sponsors to want to become involved with the program.

In planning local media efforts, start by recognizing that a strong committee will make the job easier and more effective. Regardless of how many different audiences need to be reached, a strong communications program requires an energetic leader, with partners and volunteers who can disseminate the information about what CERTs are and what they do.

Developing and Maintaining Media Relations

To help create a strong public information initiative, tap into people within your department or CERT volunteers who have relationships with the media. Build on existing relationships. You may want to have a Communications Committee.

If possible, identify one or more individuals with public relations or marketing backgrounds for your committee. CERT success will stem from a positive message of how the program can benefit the community. As you select Communications Committee members, consider those who:

- Own businesses.
- Are familiar with local media.
- Understand the uses of computers and the Internet.
- Have experience in fundraising.
- Can commit time to the CERT program.

Finally, invite members of the media to take the training. Having them participate and see the value of the training can make them an advocate. Many CERT programs have gained positive exposure by newspaper articles or brief coverage on the evening news.

Keeping Volunteers Involved

Although your CERT volunteers may be committed to the program, it is important to keep them involved by continuing to provide meaningful assignments.

Today's volunteers are looking for positions that present a challenge or the chance to learn a new skill. Some volunteers are looking to tap their creativity, meet other people, take a break from their jobs, or just feel like they're accomplishing something. If you create short- and long-term volunteer assignments with differing levels of commitment, you will be able to draw from a wider variety of volunteers. As you create the volunteer base, look for a volunteer manager who can help translate overall CERT needs into task assignments.

Your partners and volunteers are priceless assets. Use their abilities to help you meet CERT goals—not just in communicating successes but in other areas as well. Be sure to recognize their efforts through thank-you notes, awards ceremonies, or other means.

Introducing CERT to the Public

Volunteers who are already active in the CERT program may need no introduction. But there are many potential volunteers who don't know about CERTs or what they do. Some potential volunteers have no interest in being CERT members but would be willing to volunteer in other capacities. Introducing the CERT program and its scope can help draw volunteers to your program. Try the tips below to get your message out.

- Schedule a presentation about CERT. Bring in current CERT members, and allow them to talk about the program. If possible, bring in other Program Coordinators to describe their programs and share their success stories. Invite the media. Most importantly, stress the benefits to the entire community of having an active CERT program.
- Develop flyers, and distribute them at community events.
- Place short articles in neighborhood newsletters or local newspapers. Provide a contact phone number or email address so that people who have questions or want more information know who to call or where to go for that information.
- Place a teaser on an electronic community bulletin board, together with contact information for those who want more information.

- Look for other ways to keep your program visible—and ask CERT members to share their ideas.

Most importantly, present a consistent appearance for CERT in terms of its name and message so that CERT will become a symbol for the benefits it provides to the community.

For additional information on Michigan Citizen Corps and the CERT program contact Michigan Citizen Corps Program Director Gary Zulinski at (517) 241-3867 or zulinskig@michigan.gov